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SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA: ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRAZER MEETS WITH
CHOD LTG SAMORA ON THE OGADEN, SOMALIA, AND ERITREA

Classified By: Ambassador Donald Yamamoto. Reason: 1.4 (D).

11. (S//NF) SUMMARY. LTG Samora Yenus, Ethiopian military Chief of Staff, on September 6 discussed his views on the Ogaden, Somalia, and Eritrea with visiting Assistant Secretary of State Jendayi Frazer, the Ambassador, DATT, and

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POLOFF. Samora explained that the situation in the Ogaden was well in hand and that military operations would be completed in a few months. In addition, he suggested the real problem was a media conspiracy to undermine Ethiopia. On Somalia, Samora made it clear Ethiopia would like to withdraw, but circumstances required they remain for the time being. Samora also stressed Ethiopia was prepared to fight a short war with Eritrea if provoked, but his preference would be to wait Eritrea out. END SUMMARY.

NOTHING TO SEE IN THE OGADEN, IT'S A MEDIA CONSPIRACY

12. (S//NF) LTG Samora explained to Assistant Secretary of State Jendayi Frazer and the Ambassador on September 6 the ENDF had nearly completed its mission in the Somali region against Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) rebels, but the real problem was a media conspiracy to overthrow the Ethiopian government. Samora explained the media, "was paid to lie," and since the enemies of Ethiopia had failed to bring down the government in 2005 after the elections, the media and others were using issues like the Ogaden to continue undermining the government. He asserted the soldiers of the ENDF were friends of the Ethiopian people and there had been no house burning or massacres against its own people. He said if the army used such tactics we could have used them in Somalia, but we did not and the people of the Ogaden support us. Samora further asserted the army would not follow an order to kill civilians because it is an army of national composition trained to target combatants, not civilians.

13. (S//NF) Samora explained the army's strategy in the Ogaden was one of search and attack to go after small groups of rebels. He asserted the army was not using artillery or tanks, and helicopters were only being used to ferry wounded and to deploy troops. Samora said military operations against the ONLF would be complete in two to three months and underscored the situation in the region was OK. Samora

claimed most of the fighting was being done by militias and regional police.

14. (S//NF) The general added the ONLF was supported by rich diaspora financiers, some NGOs, diverted food aid, and Eritrea, and therefore, the government's actions to set off the military security zones were intended to deny the ONLF assistance. He then asserted, however, that all food deliveries and commercial traffic had restarted. Assistant Secretary Frazer urged Samora that open access to the region

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would help alleviate the problems. Samora replied everyone has access and, "this is not another Darfur," but complained that Ethiopia is the only government that calls the ONLF terrorists and Eritrean support to the rebels continues to be a problem. Samora alleged arms from Eritrea are coming through Galkayo, but "we cannot prove it by showing the weapons because Eritrea purchases arms from all over the world."

WE WANT TO LEAVE SOMALIA

15. (S//NF) Samora said due to financial expenses, Ethiopia wishes to leave Somalia, but asserted the African Union does not want us to depart and we cannot leave the peacekeeping forces alone in Somalia. Samora said other African countries were refusing to provide troops because of the lack of financial support. Samora claimed the situation in Somalia had improved and the remaining violence is, "not a big deal." He noted in any large city you can occasionally hear shooting. He also noted Ethiopia was training two brigades of Transitional Federal Government (TFG) forces, one of approximately 600 troops inside Ethiopia and another inside Somalia. He claimed the TFG forces were improving and was

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expecting Burundi to deploy additional forces soon.

WE ARE READY FOR WAR WITH ERITREA IF PROVOKED

16. (S//NF) Turning to the border with Eritrea, Samora said Eritrea is doing its maximum to destabilize Ethiopia and had been doing so for the last seven years. He claimed Eritrea was training Tigrayans, Oromos, Somalis, Amharas, and "everyone" to fight Ethiopia. He asserted the Eritrean Defense Force could not afford a long war and was losing its strength day by day, but Eritrea could, in desperation, do something to provoke Ethiopia. He said that although the Eritrean commanders and soldiers were demoralized, they would follow orders to fight. However, Samora admitted Ethiopia could not support a lengthy war either. Samora noted the Temporary Security Zone no longer exists because of the Eritrean troop movements into the zone and the UN observers were no longer observers rather they were watched by Eritrea.

17. (S//NF) When pressed concerning Ethiopia's strategy for Eritrea, Samora replied it would be easy to attack them, but it would be costly. He said war is expensive and against Ethiopia's interests. He queried, "if Eritrea is killing itself why attack?" Nevertheless, Samora underscored that if attacked Ethiopia would respond and would defeat Eritrea in a short period of time. Samora further stressed that Ethiopia had, for planning purposes, been preparing for a short war.

18. (S//NF) COMMENT. Although Ethiopia faces a genuine insurgent threat from the ONLF, serious humanitarian concerns remain. Assistant Secretary Frazer made it clear that commercial food trade and humanitarian food deliveries were critical to meet the needs of the Ogaden region. There still remains a lack of information on the Ogaden and additional investigation is needed to determine the true scope of the

problem and prove or disprove allegations raised in the press, by NGO groups, and the GoE. It is unclear how long the counter insurgency operation will last, but the Embassy will continue to press for opening more corridors for humanitarian food relief and also food trade. Samora refused to elaborate on Ethiopia's plans to aggressively counter Eritrean rebel support, but his statement that Ethiopia is ready to strike if attacked by Eritrea should be taken as an indication that the border situation is volatile. END COMMENT.

19. (U) A/S Frazer cleared this cable.
YAMAMOTO